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Want to boogie? You're in the right place

The disco beat may be dimming elsewhere in North America, but Montreal's irresistible urge to get up and boogie keeps its dance floors jammed. Take a tour with The Gazette's JUAN RODRIGUEZ of the night people's favorite haunts and find out how fad, fantasy and the '12-inch mix' create the beat that won't let you stop dancing.

ROCK & POP
By Juan Rodriguez

The dancers pass each other in the street, oozing style in their tight pants, striped sporty jerseys and braless blouses, striding towards the club where the most intimate fantasies can be theirs in dance.

They're heading for Jilly's, the biggest women-only nightspot in this thriving disco metropolis. But the beat that propels them onto the dance floor is the same all up and down the disco strip.

Whether they cater to the high-priced set, the gay crowd, mixed haute-mode singles or teenagers exercising their adolescent libidos, Montreal's discos are alive and kicking — as well as hustling, bumping and boogie-ing.

The disco scene in many North American cities has been fading lately, but not here. Montreal's night people would rather dance the evening away than sit still for a concert or club act.

It makes for a scene rife with variations and style.

There are the dancers who get onto the floor with the help of a few drinks. There are those who wear the slightly perspiring faces of "speed" consumers (who discreetly ingest their pills on the dance floor or in the washrooms).

Show off tightness

Some are there to show off expensive attire and some just want to show off tightness.

The main idea is to get involved in what's going down on the dance floor.

And what's happening there is a careful blend of sounds, images, fantasies and facts — always pushed by the records that capture that frenetic atmosphere.

Reproducing that beat at home has made Montrealers this country's most avid customers for disco records. Of the 300,000 copies of the disco hit single "I Love To Love" sold in Canada, 250,000 were snapped up in Quebec.

The sales proportions were much the same for such diverse material as the bouncy Bay City Rollers' item, "Don't Stop the Music" and the smarmy disco rendering of "Volare" by longtime popster Al Martino.

Local audiences are more attuned to the European sounds, in which florid, echoed string arrangements blend with the cooler rhythms of American disco records.

That's not the only way Montreal blends the flavors of the American styles it lives so close to with the European lifestyle it wants to emulate.

The success of the disco scene rests in that mix. The fever of the American night scene combines here with a more refined, European penchant for evening entertaining.

The result is a new freedom which spurs people on to fling away inhibitions — or reflect them to perfection.

Above all, dancers here enjoy the company of their peers, no matter what set they fit into.

Thus the city boasts the likes of Harlequin, the plush, posh night spot in Le Quatre Saisons Hotel, with its demure glitter, pricy fashion, velvet suits and flowing dresses. Harlow offers a slightly more outgoing atmosphere, attracting downtowners and public personalities alike.

Exotic mixture

There is the Stanley St. disco strip, dominated by the Lime Light and its three storeys' worth of dance floors, plus the Tube and Le Jardin, which caters to men only. Four blocks away is Jilly's, for women only.

Bohemian college dancers crowd the Café Campus, near the Universite de Montreal, while the Palais d'Or, on Bishop St., draws a wildly mixed crowd. This slightly tacky Swiss-styled ballroom attracts, on the weekends, as exotic a mix of dancers as any room in the city.

And there are the teenagers, who substitute corduroys for jeans to comply with the no-jeans policy at the largest non-licensed spot in the province, Recreatheque in Laval. It's not unusual to see 3,000 pubescent people pile into this club on weekends.

Sound and lighting

Sound and lighting are everything in the discos; some clubs, like the Lime Light, utilize up to $30,000 in equipment to attain the right atmosphere — often creating the feeling of a "space odyssey" on feet. The success of discos depends as much on the disc jockey's selection and programming of records as on the rhythmic pulse of lights reflecting on records, and sound systems that can virtually control the dancer's mind.

Success also means being able to keep in step with changing sexual mores. The Lime Light is conducting a campaign that features such across-the-board audience attractions as James Brown and the Salsoul Orchestra, in an attempt to attract more "straight" sex groups into the club. But the competition a few doors away, Le Jardin, steadfastly boasts its "pour hommes seulement" policy.

Why do Montrealers keep flocking to this diversity of nightspots, when the disco beat is getting dimmer most other places?

"Montrealers go to discos to enjoy themselves, without other motives," is the explanation offered by one of the people who keeps the disco machine fuelled.

Dominique Zgarka of the Canadian Record Pool says other cities' disco scenes have been overrun by prostitution and drug-pushing. But here, it's the desire simply to dance that keeps his two-year-old outfit healthy.

There's such a strong turnout for local discos that Zgarka's operation has grown from its original function — a pool to promote and evaluate record company samples of disco fare — to retailing sound and lighting equipment and records.

"We don't sell many albums," says Zgarka, pointing to a stand of about a dozen album titles in his St. Laurent Blvd. shop, "because people would rather buy the song rather than the artist. It's the sound of the song that counts."

The '12-inch mix'

To this end, the Record Pool has helped pioneer the "12-inch mix," large discs of single songs that are extended for six or 10 minutes and contain the fidelity within their large grooves that's needed to blast out on the sound speaker system.

The large discs always sound better than the smaller sized records generally available — which is the best way of selling the latter.

Since most disco-goers enjoy hearing booming sounds they could not possibly hear at home, the 12-inch mixes succeed perfectly in selling both the club sound and the less powerful-sounding seven-inch singles.

The bottom line of disco clubs is the metronome beat — the busing drum cymbals; the babbling bass configurations (almost computer-like); and the echoed vocals (grunts, groans, sighs, exhortations) and florid string arrangements. The slick sounds offer a constant drum-beat to the dancer seeking out partners of the same or opposite sex, as well as the dancer who wants just to dance in private communion with the beat.

THEY'D RATHER DANCE: Dawn Johnson and Tran Quoc-Viet prove this is no city of concert-goers

IN THE LIME LIGHT: An eclectic mix of styles at a favorite spot, but the smiles stay the same

LILIAN SOTIROPOULOS — MAGGIE GOUSSE — MICHEL DEGUIRE

WHERE THEY ARE AND WHAT THEY'RE LIKE

NOTE: There's a $2 to $3 cover charge Friday to Sunday in most discos. Jeans are banned except at Café Campus. And don't go hungry: Only Le Tube serves snacks.

DISCO	ADDRESS	HOURS	PHONE	OFFERINGS
Le Limelight	1254 Stanley St.	9 p.m.-6 a.m.	871-0057	Three floors of discos. Occasional live talent.
Le Tube	1498 Stanley St.	9 p.m.-6 a.m.	842-8539	Pizza from 3-6 a.m.
Lovers	1165 St. Hubert	9 p.m.-3 a.m.	288-3241	Occasional radio programs.
Harlequin	1050 Sherbrooke W.	9 p.m.-3 a.m.	284-1110	Posh haute mode.
Harlow	1285 de Maisonneuve W.	9 p.m.-3 a.m.	282-0220	Subdued
Dominique's	1455 Stanley	9 p.m.-3 a.m.	845-0033	Live music policy. High-tone. atmosphere.
Le Jardin	1258 Stanley	9 p.m.-3 a.m.	878-1476	Men only
Le Studio I	968 Ste. Catherine W.	9 p.m.-3 a.m. (until 6 a.m. Fri. and Sat.)	871-1755	Men only
Jilly's	1426 Bishop	9 p.m.-3 a.m.	842-4924	Women only
Palais d'Or	1226 Stanley	9 p.m.-3 a.m.	866-8135	Ballroom. Occasional live talent. mixed crowd.
Cafe Campus	3315 de la Reine Marie	8 p.m.-3 a.m.	735-1259	Campus dress. Occasional live concerts.
Recreatheque (Kebecelectric)	900 Labelle, Laval	685-8980 Wed. 8 p.m.-mid. Fri.: 8 p.m.-2 a.m. Sat.: 1 p.m.-5 a.m. and 8 p.m.-3 a.m. Sun.: 8 p.m.-1 a.m.		No liquor, young patrons.

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